



From Hybrid to Online Courses: Navigating Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The unprecedented Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) created many unforeseen challenges in education. In order to continue students' education, North Carolina's higher education institutions, as well as primary and secondary schools in the United States, shifted to a completely online environment. This shift from traditional teaching to remote learning was done so rapidly that challenges may have been encountered for both faculty and students. Faculty were required to pay special attention to students in order for them to be as ready as possible and fully equipped to switch to an online setting. Focusing in particular on community colleges, hybrid instructors may have focused on Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) when considering curriculum, but what does this practice look like in the transition to a fully online course? Therefore, it is paramount for faculty to ensure that all students from different backgrounds receive clear instructions and directions, in order to avoid frustration and inconsistency. Faculty learning to navigate this transition can present challenges while ensuring cultural responsiveness and keeping students motivated and reassured in their learning journey.

Keywords: Culturally responsive teaching, online teaching and learning, community colleges, diversity, COVID-19

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Community colleges enhance education and stay

current with the shifts of society. For many community colleges, a portion of their mission is to create a strong sense of community and cultural development. As society continues to be fluid and more diverse, a need is created to attract and retain students with diverse backgrounds on higher education campuses; in order to survive, higher education institutions must put diversity conversations at the forefront (Smith, 2009). As stated in Smith (2009), "Culture takes longer to change than climate, and it must be framed so that diversity can be facilitated rather than obstructed" (p. 67). Particularly in community colleges, there is an attempt to implement equity and diversity through a variety of programs, in order to prepare students to transition to either a real-life work setting or to a four-year higher education institution.

Literature Review

According to Gómez-Rey et al. (2018), it is important to prepare instructors with what it means to teach and learn in technology-rich environments. As educators prepare to instruct their students, there needs to be an increased intention behind the instruction (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009). These conversations regarding diversity and equity instruction have prompted CRT. Zorba (2020) stated, "CRT is considered the extension of multicultural education in the classroom as multicultural education is mostly related to plans, ideas, and organizations on paper" (p. 42). The main goal of CRT is to recognize that though students may be in the same classroom at the same time, all students bring different perspectives into the classroom. Socioeconomic

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status, environment growing up, racial/ethnic status, and gender may impact a student's learning experience. In an effort to provide a successful experience for their students, instructors may provide examples that extend to as many students as possible, as well as provide room for narratives to be heard.

Many higher education educators hold the view that their vocation is providing students transformative experiences within an equal and equitable learning environment. As with students, instructors also have different social, ethical, cultural, and geographical backgrounds, which can make teaching and learning experiences challenging (Heitner & Jennings, 2016). For instructors, clearly stating culturally responsive issues and practices (Heitner & Jennings, 2016), being intentional about learning (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009), and continuing to foster diversity in higher education (Smith, 2009) will continue to enhance instruction and challenge the status quo. In Garrett et al. (2021), the study reveals that faculty working in community colleges in North Carolina have yet to receive the opportunity to thoroughly implement CRT in their pedagogical practices and ensure that all students are treated equally. A way to ensure faculty receive current information regarding practices and policies is to offer development. These trainings can support instructors in their effort to establish a connection with students and to enhance learning that recognizes diversity and, at the same time, challenges inequity in regard to race, culture, and stereotypes. Updating training for CRT will allow for new, intentional practices that will benefit students. For example, it may be common for instructors to begin their courses by asking students their preferred pronouns. Being aware of current needs from the pandemic in an online environment can only increase the feel of a community for students.

In traditional or hybrid course environments, it may be easier to learn how a student identifies because students may feel more comfortable sharing identities with their peers. In an online environment, students may not feel as comfortable with publicly identifying their identities due to the barrier between their computer and their peers. If a marginalized student already feels isolated online, their concerns may increase due to cyberbullying (Kanbul & Ozansoy, 2019). In an online setting, engagement is particularly important as students have less opportunities to interact with other students and their institutions (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). Though it may be chal-

lenging, building a sense of community can be done online through a variety of synchronous and asynchronous activities. As in seated or hybrid courses, instructors need to be clear about their policies, intentional about their instruction, and facilitate fruitful conversations.

In classes with marginalized students, there should be representation and narratives for their voices. If educators provided a comprehensive education that included narratives from all possible representation of a myriad of groups, what would that mean for the status quo? Would funding for education be available? Would there be support for this kind of curriculum? With the emphasis on CRT, there seems to be some evidence to support this educational goal. CRT is especially important during the pandemic as this unprecedented time has caused many higher education institutions to be fully online. As instructors navigate their courses from a hybrid to a fully online environment, communication and instructions for assignments need to be clear for all students. For instance, assignments with a variety of examples can reach students where they are.

It needs to be questioned if higher education campuses are ready for abrupt changes in their educational norm and what support is there for faculty and students during an unforeseen transition. In this study, the authors researched the following questions:

1. How did faculty and students define CRT before, during, and after COVID-19?
2. What did COVID-19 teach us about implementing CRT in current and future online learning?
3. What are the ramifications of COVID-19 in community colleges in relation to support of CRT?

Research Design

The research design consisted of a mixed methods approach as there was quantitative and qualitative data collection. A total of eight faculty and thirty-one students from the same community college participated in this study. This community college was chosen because in 2019, it was ranked the eleventh best online community college in the nation (SR Education Group, 2019). Additionally, this Southern community college was ranked the 2020 second-best community college in North Carolina (Niche, 2020). After obtaining IRB approval, the surveys that

were conducted were semi-structured (see Appendices 1 and 2). A semi-structured survey consists of both closed-ended such as multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions, where participants could elaborate further on some of the topics.

For the open-ended questions, a constant comparison method was then used so the open-ended responses can be compared and analyzed accordingly. As such, open-ended responses were categorized under themes and subthemes, which allowed the researchers to examine and interpret the responses to address each open-ended question.

Faculty Demographics

A survey was sent out to all faculty members at a southern community college in North Carolina. Anonymity to all participants ensured. A total of eight

faculty members responded. For years of teaching experience, 25% had been at southern community college for five years or less; 12.5% had been at the college between six to 10 years; 37.5% had been at the college for 11 to 15 years; and 25% had been at the college for 16 years or more. 87.5% were full-time faculty and/or department heads, with the remaining 12.5% as adjuncts.

Faculty Findings

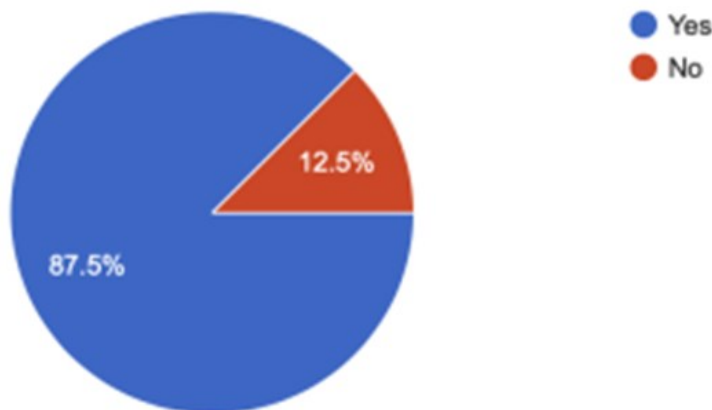
On the next question, faculty were asked if they had ever taught a fully online class prior to the spring 2020 semester, or before the rapid course format change due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 87.5% had taught full online classes before and 12.5% had not, as can be seen in Graph 1.

Graph 1

Responses to question 3 of the faculty survey

Prior to the Spring 2020 semester, have you ever taught any fully online classes?

8 responses



In the survey, it was noted that the majority of the participants had experiences teaching an online course prior to the Spring semester. This is confirmed as this particular community college offers many courses in both hybrid and online formats; humanities, communication and social sciences faculty all have the opportunity to teach online courses and receive training on online teaching (Anonymous, 2020).

If participants answered yes to teaching fully online courses before, they were asked to complete

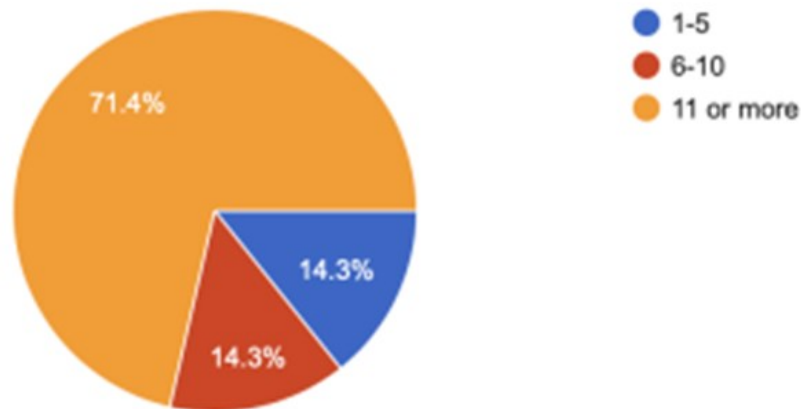
an additional question of how many fully online courses they had taught. 14.3% had taught one to five courses; 14.3% had taught six to 10 courses; while 71.4% had taught 11 or more, as Graph 2 shows. Graph 2 responses confirmed that the majority of faculty had taught over 11 or more online courses. As such, it should be noted that the participants had the opportunity to increase and improve their online teaching experiences prior to the start of the pandemic.

Graph 2

Responses to question 3a of the faculty survey

If you answered yes to the above question, how many fully online courses have you taught?

7 responses



Faculty were asked if they had completed training or professional development on CRT and the response rate was 100%. Since the participants answered yes to this question, a follow up question on what they learned was asked. Common themes were use of pronouns in class, being ADA compliant, specific training placed in classes, and being intentional about online students' and their needs. Some of their needs included ethical considerations, anonymity for students to be brave, and placing an emphasis on cultures and recognizing that not everyone is from the same culture.

Participants were then asked to define CRT before COVID-19. One participant responded the same as how they learned what CRT is. Again, themes of recognizing all students' cultures and perspectives were apparent. Another participant suggested providing representative examples for all groups in the classes would be beneficial. A participant also suggested that CRT should be embedded in all classes. Lastly, one participant stated that, "In a seated class you could talk to students to see how their culture differs and how to change the way you taught a subject to them."

On the next question, faculty were asked to define CRT during COVID-19. Again, themes of being proactive to meet students where they are was present during the findings. Responses of COVID-19

specific related answers were also given. This response from one of the participants highlights the other participants' responses, "In an online class you do not have that one-on-one contact to determine if you need to change the way you teach a subject. Unless a student tells you that they do not understand because of the way they think or because of their cultural learning ways, it is much harder to do."

Then, faculty were asked to define CRT after COVID-19. Similar responses were given from defining CRT before and during COVID-19. However, two comments illuminate the responses for this section. One participant stated, "I do not know yet. I'm not certain we'll ever enter a true 'post COVID-19' era. At our institution, I believe that we will continue with our philosophy to meet students where they are and bring them into fruition of their aspirations and dreams. We have always focused on meeting the specific needs of each individual and removing barriers that impair their quest for success." Another participant took this conversation further by expanding upon using what we have learned about CRT during COVID-19 to an after COVID 19 environment. "Educators and institutions need to use these moments for leveraging resources in a post COVID-19 time; if we could secure access, devices, and the 'tools' needed for all (to be checked out, provided, stipends for technology, etc.), then that

would help tremendously moving forward. I think the online format (for some) has also made the prediction of face to face involvement after COVID-19 unpredictable as in some situations, it is more convenient although not quite as humanizing. It will be critical for educators to think about how to continue creating online spaces that still 'feel' closer to the real thing (experiential activities, etc.)."

Upon answering how prepared the participants felt to switch completely online, most felt that the transition was rather easy. One faculty member commented that their hybrid course was already set up to be fully online, whereas another faculty member taught completely online.

Students Demographics

A survey was sent out to all students at a Southern community college. As the informed consent ensured anonymity to all participants, students who identified themselves as non-native English speakers, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer questioning and other identities (LGBTQ+) were invited to participate. Out of thirty-one students who responded, twenty-five participants responded with trustworthy and credible responses. In the open-ended questions, responses such as "N/A" or blank ones were not considered as trustworthy or credible for the results analysis. As such, 67.7% of the participants were between the ages of 15 and 25, followed by 19.4% who were 36 or older; 9.7% were between 26 and 30 years old and the rest, between 31 and 35 years old. Additionally, 77.4% of the participants identified themselves as female and 22.6% as male.

Seven of the participants considered themselves to be heterosexual, four as lesbian or queer, one did not wish to answer, and one was pansexual. Four responses such as "normal", "married", "N/A", and "I am a minor" seemed ambiguous; therefore, they were not taken into consideration for the further result analysis. As far as the first language spoken at home was concerned, 12.9% of the respondents spoke Spanish, 3.2% Hmong, and the rest of the participants were English speakers.

Students Findings

The first open question asked to the participants: How would you define CRT? First of all, there was a strong focus on teaching methods, such as: "It is a kind of teaching that makes connections between education information and students daily lives/culture", and "how teachers teach based on the cultures around them". Students state that teaching must be done with a focus on recognizing and cele-

brating each student's own culture, as they explained: "Encouraging students to relate content to their culture", "Being able to teach in cross-culture or multicultural setting. Teachers who are able to encourage other students to use their culture to help them in a subject matter", "teaching in a multicultural environment." In addition, honoring heritage speaker students seems to be important for one of them; as to them, CRT consists of: "Teaching that is done bilingual".

There are also students who are unsure of how to define CRT as the following responses show: "Never had one", "No clue", and "I do not know". However, one response shows that they would be interested in finding out more about CRT: "I would love more diversity training available". Throughout the past months, several students from various courses have reached out to instructors to tell them about their current situation as they adapted to this new normal. Some students are still confused about the course format, as stated in this response: "CRT is when classes are taught by a teacher both online and in person?". Therefore, it has been noted that students are confused about the concept of CRT through the variety of responses, such as: "Recognizes the importance of including all aspects of learning", or "how someone identifies themselves gender-wise", which remains vague.

Other students have interpreted CRT as "an accommodation for teaching during times where the normal standards for teaching students cannot and will not work. An example is using online teaching for a global pandemic. It is being responsible while teaching in a time where there are bigger issues than school work being done." Therefore, besides taking courses, students are seeking flexibility and understanding from their teachers as they are navigating a new routine. Another student includes the concept of diversity in their definition of CRT: "A term that people use so they can give special privilege to people that are too lazy to do their coursework so that they are not labeled as racist or homophobic. Which is not fair to any student regardless of color or sexual orientation that actually does their work and applies themselves in class." Therefore, there seems to be a need to redefine the concept of CRT so that students are aware of what CRT entails, particularly in an online environment.

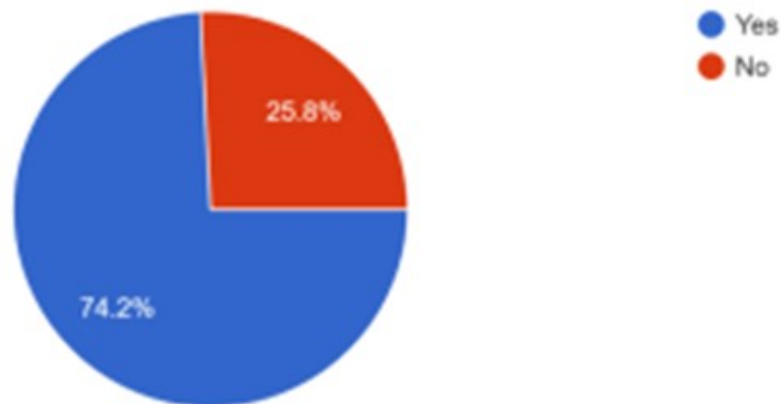
The next question then asked whether prior to the Spring 2020 semester, students had ever taken any fully online classes. This third graph shows that pri-

or to the COVID-19 pandemic, over the majority of the students have taken an online course. With 74.2% there should be some familiarity with being a student in an online class. At this community col-

lege, it is noted that students can take one class online or their entire degree online. This creates a narrative for student opportunity and student success regardless of where students are located.

Graph 3
Responses to question 5 of the student survey

Prior to the Spring 2020 semester, have you ever taken any fully online classes?
31 responses

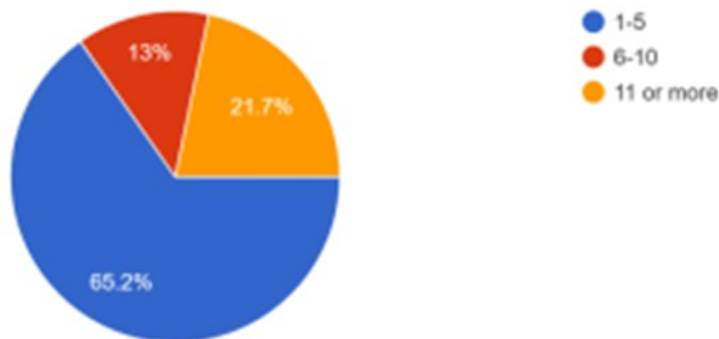


In the following graph 4 however, over half of the students stated that they had only taken 1-5 fully online courses, and almost a fourth of them have taken 11 or more. Therefore, it can be concluded

that students are still getting accustomed to fully online courses and need additional guidance in order to navigate their new schedule.

Graph 4
Responses to question 6 of the student survey

If you answered yes to the above question, how many class have you taken fully online?
23 responses

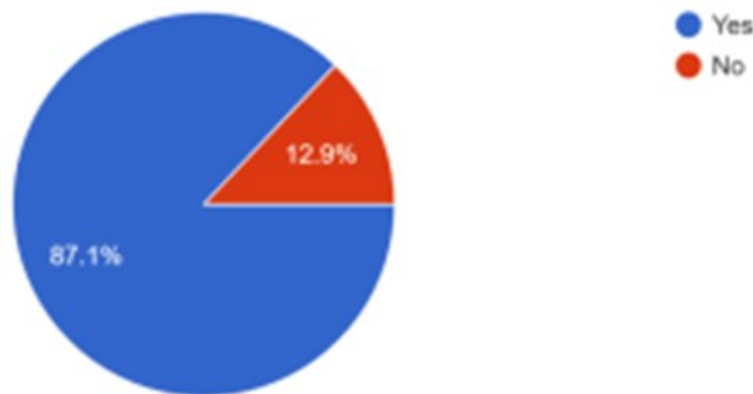


On the next question, how prepared were you to switch from face-to-face to fully online courses, responses greatly vary, from seventeen students affirming that they were either “very prepared”, or “somewhat prepared”, to fourteen of them stating that they were “not very prepared, it was a sudden adjustment for [them]”. Though this community college has provided access to online learning,

Graph 5

Responses to question 8 of the student survey

Did you feel like your instructors were accommodating and flexible?
31 responses



Graph 5 shows that overall, they have received positive impacts from their professors as despite the fact that the majority of students were not as prepared to switch to a fully online class format, 87.1% of them affirmed that their instructors were accommodating and flexible. As such, this result aligns with the faculty’s responses in Graph 1 and 2, which highlight that over the majority of them had experiences teaching online courses. Additionally, faculty affirmed that training on CRT was taken, which intentionally aims to support students’ needs in an online or hybrid environment. This confirmed the level of comfort students expressed.

The next question asked them to explain how students were prepared. There were a variety of ways that instructors had prepared their students, such as through the flexibility of re doing an assignment that four students noted: “The instructors would give you extra time to complete or redo an assignment if you give them a heads up before the assignment was due”. Attendance was also optional in the event that

Graph 4 shows that the majority of the students in this sample had only taken 1-5 courses online prior to Spring 2020. This could potentially indicate a lack of confidence in the students’ ability to learn online depending on their previous lack of experience with online classes and where they are in their degree path.

an online course was mostly synchronous: “If the classes were hybrid, they made it optional to attend in person classes or they did not take attendance as a grade”. In addition, eight students stated that instructors were “very helpful”, “very flexible and accommodating to respond back to [them] in an email” and “were willing to work on extensions and what not”, which shows that instructors wanted students to succeed. A student stated that instructors “have tried to help me in anyway probably”.

Two students noted the challenges involved in the use of technology: “I don't have many video calls to distract myself with, so I would say I'm doing okay. My classes anyways were supposed to be taken online, so it didn't really change what I needed to do. My instructors gave me lots of resources to use and help myself with. I personally don't mind teaching myself the material, so that was never the issue”. When students are accustomed to taking online courses and are autonomous to manage their time, it appears that they felt more confident throughout

the semester. Students are also understanding that taking an online course is challenging on both ends: “My teachers did the best they could to accommodate our classes online but it is hard to teach how to operate machines online.” Another student noted that: “Online classes is just like in person classes, the instructor expects everything to be turned in on time. There really isn't a difference. I'm not too sure if it was the instructors really being flexible, but having online classes allows you to have a more flexible schedule”. Therefore, taking an online course can still appear as challenging for students who are not fully prepared to taking them, as the next question of the survey focused on.

As such, when students were asked to talk about what challenges they faced when switching to fully online courses, four people responded that they did not have any. One stated that they had been doing it “since sophomore year of high school”. Another challenge that was noted is the access to the internet. As four students stated, “access to internet, “computer crashing”, and the lack of “ability to complete in person assignments” were the main issues to be able to keep up with the course.

Understanding the material and contacting the instructor was another aspect of preparedness to online learning, as this student noted: “I struggled at some points because I'm not use to doing online classes and not all of my teachers were as helpful as others. I tried my best but, in some classes, instructions were vague and I didn't completely understand what I needed to do”. Ensuring students that instructions are clear and maintaining constant communication with them seem to be missing, but paramount.

In line with the difficulty to understand the course material, time management seemed to be an issue for the majority of the students.

“PROCRASTINATION”, typed in capital letters, was one of the responses, which shows that instructors are not the only culprits for giving too many assignments. Two other students stated: “Trying to understand more complex studies mostly alone was challenging, and time management”, and that “[they] struggled with time management because I had to learn the material on my own plus complete the assignments.”

Additionally, some students noted “distractions at home” were part of the challenges, and another one mentioned a heavy daily schedule that impeded them to fully focus on school work:

“My first issue was doing work while so many different issues were going on. School is ultimately not my first priority in the world. I have other things that I am dedicated to and issues I have to worry about as a human being. I am human before I am a student. And despite me having these worries and things I already am prioritizing before school, I still am grateful to have online courses.” Another affirmed that a: “Heavy workload in classes, little help with turning in late assignments, no work-school-life balance with heavy workload” was challenging.

Lastly, for some students, the main challenge was a lack of in-person interaction with faculty. “My main challenge was just getting used to not being in a classroom where I could ask the instructor my questions.” There is a need for students to have some face-to-face interaction, as one noted that “instructor accessibility” was an issue. In addition, one noted that: “We cannot learn how to properly operate a machine and how to do everything we need to accomplish on it, online. It has to be seated otherwise we are being cheated out of our education.”

The next question asked students what benefits were noticed in taking fully online courses. Although three responses stated that they unfortunately did not notice any, nineteen students noted their “schedule [were] more flexible”, had “more time to spend working and being with [their] family and friends”. Others stated that they had more “independence, advocating for [themselves]”, “saved more money on gas and food”, and “more sleep”.

As far as the courses themselves went, one student noted that her instructor “worked closely” with them and “was very helpful”, while another stated that “attendance is getting better. Participation is more engaging” in an online course. Therefore, virtual interaction seems to come back as being an important benefit of online learning.

The last question asked students to give their input on how they think instructors can be more accommodating. Thirteen students included positive comments and affirmed that they could not think of any, that instructors “have done everything they can”, “did great”, and “have been accommodating as they could be”.

Then, adaptability seems to be coming back the most, such as in the following response: “lighter workload along with more empathy from instructors about how much students also have going on in

their lives”. Being flexible and understanding with students is ultimately key to provide students with a sense of reassurance. In addition, some students state that instructors could “respond back to emails more quickly (if they had a slight bit of time to answer my questions during “school time” hours)”, as well as “having more conversations”.

Synchronous options were also suggested, such as in this response: “Offer optional live lessons in classes that are a little more complex like maths. Also, more tutoring options”, “have a meeting set up at a later time during 10 A.M. - 12 P.M. as many people do not wake up around 8 A.M. or 9 A.M.”, and “allow zoom to see and show to explain better instead of just emailing messages”. Nonetheless, asynchronous accommodations such as through “post [ing] lectures”, “offer study sessions”, “post videos and more explanations on certain topics of the chapter/modules”, and “offer extra resources to better understand the material at hand”. One student affirmed that “not everyone can learn material on their own by just reading chapters and looking at power-points. Just because we are assigned multiple assignments each day, and we turn them in successfully, it does not mean we are learning. We’re just trying to get by right now. Be lenient and understanding when grading”. Therefore, a blend of synchronous and asynchronous options in the courses seemed to be the most effective solution in order to fit every student’s schedule in the most flexible way.

Limitations

When this research study was conducted at the end of 2020, the pandemic was still ongoing and active. Therefore, there was a sense of uncertainty and lack of training on online practices and CRT training awareness during the global pandemic, particularly for community colleges.

Another limitation that was noted is that the study was conducted in a rural community college, this Southern community college accounted for a little over 150 faculty members. For the purpose of our study, the ones teaching humanities, communication and social sciences were invited to participate, as those fields accounted for the majority of online classes offered in the college.

In addition, enrolling a little over 10,000 students in total. Nonetheless, students who were invited to participate in the study had to fulfill the following criteria: they had to be studying humanities, communication and social sciences; as well as identifying as LGBTQIA+, non-native English speakers and/or

needing special accommodations. As previously stated in the Student Demographics section, only 25 student responses were reviewed for the study, according to the criteria that the authors decided to focus on.

Sample Size

Additionally, while a larger sample size does provide better representation of the population (Andrade, 2020), it should be noted that smaller sample sizes still provide data that could be used to further the research in this area. Prior to the pandemic highlighting barriers to success, such as consistent Internet access, was already a topic of conversation. However, as noted by some of our participants, this was exacerbated as access to the Internet, computer crashing, and the lack of ability to complete assignments in a computer lab on campus may not have been an option. This accessibility barrier is in alignment with economic mobility. There is often a link between education and income; typically, the more education a person has, the more income they make. This brings forth the question of how can students in a community college utilize their campus resources in order for more economic success? Especially in North Carolina, economic mobility is low (Richardson, 2019). Is it reasonable to expect more increased economic mobility during a pandemic when there are less resources for academic support? An assumption would be that students who are enrolled in higher education would have consistent access to the Internet. However, as indicated by our participants in the survey, daily access to the Internet may have been a challenge.

Discussion

At that particular Southern community college, it appeared that most faculty were working full-time and over the majority of them had been teaching several online courses, prior to the pandemic. Faculty also stated that training on CRT was received, which shows that the institution is aware of the need to address and implement CRT in the courses. Regarding students’ experiences, Gómez-Rey et al. (2018) suggested that a limitation of having students assess learning is that they are not subject matter experts, and sometimes their experience is limited to their own motivations; however, that does not mean that students cannot have valuable information on a course. When answers were compared with students’, it appeared that many students were unaware of the concept of CRT and willing to learn more

about it. In the results, it was noted that several students were willing to represent more cultures in the course content and enable students to showcase their own backgrounds, so they can have the opportunity to build an online community with their peers and the instructors. This reveals that instructors are to facilitate this collaboration so students fully feel included in an online learning environment. As the COVID-19 pandemic required all community college courses to switch to an online format, implementing CRT in this setting became paramount to ensure students' success during an unprecedented time. Due to the pandemic, the shift to fully online courses forced community college students to become fully online students regardless of whether they wanted to be or not.

New challenges arose for many students as they navigated positive learning strategies and new challenges for faculty. One participant expressed that there were inconsistencies from faculty in their instructions to the students. While faculty participants reported that they had previous training on CRT, the pandemic was unexpected, so training about communication, expectations, and other practices that could be followed during a pandemic to ensure CRT in an online format were nonexistent. As noted by Garrett et al. (2021), community colleges in North Carolina still need to implement further CRT strategies into their pedagogy, particularly focusing on underrepresented students. An area for future research and professional development is to continue to highlight the need for communication and other areas of CRT in an online environment. Funding and other support from the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) should take initiatives for faculty to include other training to help support and appropriately align CRT in their online classes.

As such, the intent of this study was to address the challenges that contributed to fully online learning for NCCCS during the pandemic. On one hand, the goal is to uncover ways in which administrators and instructional designers can focus on ensuring that CRT is a priority in unprecedented transitions. On the other hand, as community college educators are to provide a positive learning experience, at the conclusion of this study, the intended outcome is to establish the important connections with students that provide them the support that is needed. Despite the awareness and the knowledge that faculty have on CRT, there remains to be more efforts to be

done for community college instructors to implement more inclusivity in their online courses. As most students appear to be less trained and knowledgeable on CRT, but wish to learn more about it, one standardized way to catch students' attention and raise awareness on CRT would be to include a definition of it in the syllabus. Faculty can then ensure that students fully read and understand the syllabus by including a short activity such as a scavenger hunt in the syllabus, where they would have to find the correct responses.

As it was found in the results, students wish to receive constant feedback and support from the instructors through a blend of synchronous and asynchronous virtual options. Therefore, it may be in the best interest to include a variety of options in the course, throughout the semester. Synchronous sessions, however, may be optional and recorded for students whose schedule does not allow them to log in on time. As every student has had different experiences with online courses, it is paramount for instructors to provide them with different options to access the materials, lectures, and the instructors themselves.

As far as the assignments are concerned, it was found that students requested more clarity and directions. Therefore, a way to address this need could be through clear sentences, perhaps with bullet points or even a short video instruction or announcement from the instructor. Showing students that the instructors are available to them in order to build some relationships with them. In addition, in order to account for all students' different backgrounds, instructors should ensure to include more diverse materials in the curriculum. For instance, incorporating visuals such as pictures and videos from different cultures and places may be one way to make online students feel included, as well as opening their eyes to other cultures. In addition, instructors may focus on activities that present intentionally structured environments, ensuring that each student is accommodated accordingly, and facilitating critical reflection. In an online environment, instructors mentioned the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), understanding students' multiculturalism and English as a Second Language (ESL) as needed, and establishing a connection with students in order to know who they are. Allowing them to introduce themselves through a video could be a fruitful way to understand students more. Additionally, students who are for in-

stance first generation students may need different accommodation and guidance than students with disabilities, or socioeconomic diversity. Therefore, it is the instructor's role to ensure that each student feels included in the online environment, to increase their confidence and their sense of belonging.

Recommendations

As Smith and Ayers (2006) suggested, "Internet-based technologies offer an unprecedented opportunity for aboriginal languages and cultures to showcase their perspectives and accomplishments" (p. 406). From our participants' responses regarding CRT in the online environment, it is clear that there was a disconnect between what was offered in a course's online environment and what was needed.

As it was found in the results, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, community college students wish to receive constant feedback and support from the instructors through a blend of synchronous and asynchronous virtual options. Therefore, it may be in the best interest to include a variety of options in the course, throughout the semester. Synchronous sessions, however, may be optional and recorded for students whose schedule does not allow them to log in on time. As every student has had different experiences with online courses, it is paramount for instructors to provide them with a variety of options to access the materials, lectures, and the instructors themselves.

A challenge that educators may face when utilizing CRT in an online setting is design and implementation. As Smith and Ayers (2006) suggested, "for community college educators, responsiveness to cultural uniqueness must emerge in the planning, design, implementation, and assessment of learning experiences, particularly those offered at a distance through instructional technologies" (p. 405). This indicates there may be a need for additional funding allocations in order to ensure community colleges have access to any necessary technology as well as development in planning, design, and implementation. When addressing CRT in an online environment, it is also imperative to remember that there is a perceived Western bias and "...spoken or written words, images, activities, and body language may be assigned diverse meanings by individuals of different cultures" (Smith and Ayers, 2006, p. 406). Since NCCCS has an open-door policy for the student population, representation of cultural diversity is necessary for student success.

As far as the assignments are concerned, it was found that students requested more clarity and directions. Therefore, a way to address this need could be through clear sentences, perhaps with bullet points or even a short video instruction or announcement from the instructor. Showing students that the instructors are available to them in order to build some relationships with them. In addition, in order to account for all students' different backgrounds, instructors should ensure to include more diverse materials in the curriculum. For instance, incorporating visuals such as pictures and videos from different cultures and places may be one way to make online students feel included, as well as opening their eyes to other cultures. In addition, instructors may focus on activities that present intentionally structured environments, ensuring that each student is accommodated accordingly, and facilitating critical reflection. In an online environment, instructors mentioned the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), understanding students' multiculturalism and English as a Second Language (ESL) as needed, and establishing a connection with students in order to know who they are. Allowing them to introduce themselves through a video could be a fruitful way to understand students more. Additionally, community college students who for instance identify as first-generation students may need different accommodation and guidance than students with disabilities, or socioeconomic diversity. Therefore, it is the instructor's role to ensure that each student feels included in the online environment, to increase their confidence and their sense of belonging.

Other ways to promote CRT in an online setting could be done through interviewing students if they are willing, bringing guest speakers through a synchronous meeting, gamifying lessons, encouraging students to propose ideas of projects, and engaging them in run problem-based scenarios. Students will then feel empowered and responsible for their learning experiences, and will have an active role in their courses (Brown University, 2021).

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to bring new challenges for community college instructors in the courses, it is important to ensure that not only instructors but also students are fully prepared to receive high quality higher education, despite studying in a virtual environment. As training was available for instructors to transition from hybrid/in-person to online courses, there is still a need to fill

in the gap between the students' vague knowledge of CRT, as some stated that they did not feel fully included in their courses. Therefore, more inclusive practices should be implemented as Neville et al. (2013) also affirmed. All students and faculty's identities should be acknowledged and further CRT opportunities may have a positive impact on fostering a more diverse environment. Aligning both students and instructors' preparedness for an online learning environment will contribute to student success and enrollment increase in community college institutions.

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Authors' Note

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Appendix 1: Faculty Survey Questions

1. Years of experience teaching at [this community college]

Less than 5 years; 6- 10 years; 11-15 years; 16 years or more

2. My faculty rank is: Adjunct Instructor; Instructor or Lecturer; Department Head

3. Prior to the Spring 2020 semester, have you ever taught any fully online classes? Yes; No

3.1 If yes, how many? 1-5, 6-10, 11 or more

4. Have you received training/professional development on culturally responsive teaching or diversity and inclusion in online teaching? Yes; No

4.1 If yes, please explain what you have learned (open-ended)

5. How would you define culturally responsive teaching - CRT -before COVID-19? (open ended)

6. How would you define CRT teaching during COVID-19? (open-ended) 7. How would you define CRT after COVID-19? (open-ended)

8. How prepared were you to switch from hybrid to fully online courses? (open-ended)

9. What challenges did you face when switching to fully online courses? (open-ended)

10. What benefits did you notice when teaching fully online courses? (open-ended)

11. Besides CRT, what other inclusive instruction methods do you employ for your students to have an equitable online learning environment as possible? (open-ended)

Appendix 2: Student Survey Questions

1. Age: 18-25; 26-30, 31-35, 36 or older
2. Gender: Male; Female; Transgender or other; Do not wish to respond
3. Sexual orientation: (open-ended)
4. First language spoken at home if different than English: (open-ended)
5. How would you define culturally responsive teaching (CRT)? (open-ended)
6. Prior to the Spring 2020 semester, have you ever taken any fully online classes? Yes; No
 - 6.1 If so, how many? 1-5; 6-10; 11 or more
7. How prepared were you to switch from face-to-face to fully online courses? (open-ended)
8. Did you feel like your instructors were accommodating and flexible? Yes; No
 - 8.1 If so, please explain: (open-ended)
9. What challenges did you face when switching to fully online courses? (open-ended)
10. What benefits did you notice in taking fully online courses? (open-ended)
11. How do you think instructors can be more accommodating to you? (open-ended)